

|  |                                       |  |  |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|--|
|  |                                       |  |  |
| Last checked   |                                       |  |  |
| 6 September 2014   |                                       |  |  |
|  | Document last updated: 30 August 2019 |  |  |
| <p>This document and information herein are copyrighted to Saturday Walkers' Club. If you are interested in printing or displaying any of this material, Saturday Walkers' Club grants permission to use, copy, and distribute this document delivered from this World Wide Web server with the following conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The document will not be edited or abridged, and the material will be produced exactly as it appears. Modification of the material or use of it for any other purpose is a violation of our copyright and other proprietary rights.</li> <li>* Reproduction of this document is for free distribution and will not be sold.</li> <li>* This permission is granted for a one-time distribution.</li> <li>* All copies, links, or pages of the documents must carry the following copyright notice and this permission notice:</li> </ul> <p>Saturday Walkers' Club, Copyright © 2012-19, used with permission. All rights reserved. <a href="http://www.walkingclub.org.uk">www.walkingclub.org.uk</a></p> |                                       |  |  |
| The publisher cannot accept responsibility for any problems encountered by readers.  |                                       |  |  |

## Seaford to Eastbourne

### The Seven Sisters and Beachy Head

|                |                               |                     |
|----------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Length:</b> | <b>Main walk</b>              | 21.9km (13.6 miles) |
|                | <b>Seaford to Exceat</b>      | 6.2km (3.9 miles)   |
|                | <b>Seaford to Birling Gap</b> | 12.7km (7.9 miles)  |
|                | <b>Seaford to East Dean</b>   | 15km (9.3 miles)    |
|                | <b>Exceat to Beachy Head</b>  | 10.4km (6.4 miles)  |
|                | <b>Exceat to Eastbourne</b>   | 15.7km (9.7 miles)  |

**Toughness:** 9 out of 10

**Maps:** OS Explorer Map: OL25 (formerly 123);  
OS Landranger Map: 199 (a small bit of the start on 198)

### Features

This classic clifftop walk – one of the finest coastal walks in England – affords stunning (and very famous) views of the white cliffs of the Seven Sisters and the renowned Beachy Head, before ending in the elegant seafront town of Eastbourne. There is quite a lot of climbing and descending on the walk - indeed, apart from the section around Cuckmere Haven and the finish along the Eastbourne seafront, almost none of it is flat – but somehow in the grandeur of the scenery the effort is not noticed.

In summer, the walk also offers numerous opportunities for a dip in the sea: see **Sea Swimming** overleaf for more details.

### Walk options

This walk is well served by Brighton city buses, which enable you to start or stop the walk at various points. The **number 12 bus** runs from Seaford via Exceat and East Dean to Eastbourne, with as many as six buses an hour Mondays to Saturdays, and three to four times an hour on Sundays. On all days of the week the service is half-hourly from about 7pm to 11pm.

There is also a **13X**, which serves **Birling Gap** and **Beachy Head** twice an hour from mid June to mid September on Sundays, but only three times a day Mondays to Saturday, with a bus to Eastbourne currently at 5.21pm and one to Seaford at 6.24pm. For the rest of the year (mid September to mid June), it operates three times a day on Sundays only.

For more information on either bus, see [www.buses.co.uk](http://www.buses.co.uk) or call 01273 886200. To catch either bus in Seaford, turn right out of the station and stay on the main road: the stop is 200 metres along on the left. In Eastbourne the bus goes stops at both the pier and the main shopping street just beyond railway station. Using these buses, you could do the following shorter versions of the walk:

**a) Seaford to Exceat:** A **6.2km (3.9 mile)** walk with beautiful views of the Seven Sisters, which can be combined with a swim and a picnic at Cuckmere Haven.

**b) Seaford to Birling Gap:** A **12.7km (7.9 mile)** walk over the Seven Sisters, with lunch at Exceat and tea at Birling Gap: You can finish here when the 13X bus is operating, or see option **c)** below.

**c) Seaford to East Dean:** In paragraph 39 on page 7 a 2.3km (1.4 mile) walk inland from Birling Gap to East Dean is provided which gives you access to the very regular number 12 bus service to Eastbourne or Seaford. Adding this to option **b)** above makes a total walk of **15km (9.3 miles)**.

**d) Exceat to Beachy Head:** A **10.4km (6.4 mile)** walk along the finest stretch of the cliffs: only possible when the 13X is operating: otherwise, you have to do option **e)** below.

**e) Exceat to Eastbourne:** A **15.7km (9.7 mile)** walk over the Seven Sisters and Beachy Head, with refreshment stops at Birling Gap and Beachy Head.

It is also interesting to **do this walk backwards**: you get a steep climb out of Eastbourne to start, can have lunch at Beachy Head or Birling Gap, and then tea at the Saltmarsh tea rooms at the end of the Seven Sisters. The **Eastbourne to East Dean** walk on this website has directions for the first half of this walk.

## Trains

Two trains an hour (one an hour on Sunday) go from **London Victoria** to Seaford, changing at **Lewes** (journey time: 1 hour 27-34 minutes). Take **the train nearest to 9.15** from Victoria to get to lunch at Exceat in time.

**Returning from Eastbourne** there are two direct trains hourly (only one is direct on Sunday; change at Brighton for the other) back from Eastbourne to Victoria (journey time: 1 hour 29 minutes/10-25 minutes longer on Sunday).

## Lunch and Tea

**The Cuckmere Inn** (01323 892247). Situated by Exceat bridge 6.2km (3.9 miles) into the walk, this pub is very popular but efficient at serving food from its wide menu. It does meals all afternoon and evening and has plenty of outside tables.

**Saltmarsh** (01323 870218). 400 metres down the road from the Cuckmere Inn, this tea room has a charming open-air courtyard and serves a varied home-made hot lunch menu, as well as sandwiches, ploughman's lunches and teas. It is open daily till 5pm in summer, Thursdays to Sundays till 4pm in winter.

**National Trust Café, Birling Gap** This self-service café, 12.7km (7.9 miles) into the walk, has a wonderful location on the cliffs above Birling Gap and is an ideal tea stop. It is open daily until 4pm in winter, 5pm in summer.

**Beachy Head** (01323 728060). This large and efficient pub is located right on the top of Beachy Head, 16.6km (10.3 miles) into the walk. As well as serving meals (the same menu as at the Cuckmere Inn) all afternoon and evening, it also offers tea and coffee, making it a possible tea stop. In summer if you're stopping for dinner, note that it is 2km (1.2 miles) from this pub to the edge of Eastbourne, and another 3.4km (2.1 miles) from there to the station.

**Qualisea Fish Restaurant** 189 Terminus Road, Eastbourne (01323 725203). There are several places to have fish and chips in Terminus Road, the road leading away from the seafront in Eastbourne, but this one, 200 metres up the street on the right, is the traditional favourite. It has

the usual takeaway, but also a large restaurant. It is open till 8pm year round, sometimes later in summer.

## Sea swimming

From mid June to September there are excellent opportunities for sea swimming on this walk, though as always you do so at your own risk. All the beaches are shingle, except for some parts of Eastbourne beach which can be sandy at low tide.

**Seaford** has a relatively gently shelving beach that is swimmable at all states of the tide and sometimes has a lifeguard, but note that you get out of your depth very quickly. When large waves are slapping onto the shingle, this beach is also postively dangerous.

A more scenic (and often more sheltered) spot for a dip is **Cuckmere Haven**, one of the few places on the South Coast where it really feels like you are wild swimming. At low tide the sea retreats over a flat expanse of shingle, however, so this is really for swimming three hours either side of high tide. The west side of the beach (passed on this walk) is much smaller than the east side (reachable by a short diversion after lunch), but both sides have their merits. Be careful of the current of the Cuckmere River between the two beaches, which could wash you out to sea.

**Birling Gap** is also a very scenic spot for a swim and is often a popular beach in summer. Again you need to be swimming two or three hours either side of high tide: outside this period the sea retreats across jagged rocks (the remains of eroded cliffs). The most awkward time is when these rocks are covered by shallow water: however, at very low tide you can sometimes pick your way through the rocks to the sea beyond. As at Seaford, larger waves can slap quite sharply down onto the shingle here, making getting in and out of the sea awkward or even dangerous.

**Eastbourne** has a long beach and a seasonal lifeguard service on the section beyond the Wish Tower (the round Martello Tower). This is a classic South Coast beach, with the sea coming up the shingle bar at high tide but retreating across sandy mud at low tide. South of the Wish Tower, low tide reveals an area of rock pools, making swimming tricky here at such times, but the main beach between the Wish Tower and pier can be swum at any state of the tide.

## WALK DIRECTIONS

***Special note:** Take care near the cliff edges on this walk, as they are crumbly and liable to collapse: the official advice is to keep 5 metres from any cliff edge.*

### **Seaford to the Cuckmere Inn and Exceat (6.2km/3.9 miles)**

1. Leaving Seaford Station turn right. In 40 metres turn right down Church Street, heading towards the church, ignoring a road (Dane Road) sharp right.
2. In another 70 metres you pass St Leonard's Church on your left, and in a further 100 metres, as the road curves to the left, continue straight on (still on Church Street).
3. In 60 metres, at a T-junction, turn left and in 10 metres turn right along The Causeway.
4. In 150 metres you come to the seafront, where you cross the road and turn left along the seafront promenade towards the chalk cliffs.
5. In 300 metres you pass the **Martello Tower**.
6. In a further 400 metres, at the start of the cliffs, veer left up the left fork of the gravel path.
7. In 100 metres veer right off this path onto the cliff top. You are now on the cliff top path, climbing uphill.
8. You now follow the cliff top path for 3km to Cuckmere Haven. Initially there is a golf course to your left. In 1km the golf course ends and you pass a sign for **Seaford Head Nature Reserve** with the white cliffs of the **Seven Sisters** now visible in the distance and a radar

The **Martello Tower** in Seaford is the most westerly of a chain of 103 such fortresses built to protect the South East coast of England against invasion in the early part of the Napoleonic Wars. The other end of the chain is in Aldeburgh in Suffolk.

beacon (a navigation aid for commercial aircraft) to your left.

9. 1.4km later, after a long steady descent, the latter part of in a shallow valley with fine views of the Seven Sisters ahead, you reach **Hope Gap**, where some steps lead down to the sea.
10. Bear left here, following the cliff top path up a steep slope. The path soon levels out and in 500 metres, you come to a row of cottages.
11. Turn right downhill here on a car-wide gravel track past the cottages.

The **Seven Sisters** is the name for the undulating cliffs between Cuckmere Haven and Birling Gap. They are thought to have been formed by glacier meltwater at the end of the last Ice Age: the meltwater carved steep sided valleys, which were then truncated by sea erosion into the cliffs we see today.

The original Seven Sisters are the Pleiades, a group of seven stars which Greek mythology portrayed as sisters. There are in fact now only six Pleiades, one having exploded in antiquity, and from the approach to Cuckmere Haven there seem to be only six humps on the Seven Sisters too (the rise on which Belle Tout lighthouse stands, beyond the brown smudge of Birling Gap visible at this point does not count, as this is not part of the Seven Sisters).

But there are in fact seven: one is hidden from view from this angle. Or are there eight? Careful attention to the walk text will reveal that between Cuckmere Haven and Birling Gap, you pass over eight hills in all – Haven Brow, Short Brow, Rough Brow, Brass Point, Flagstaff Point, Flat Hill, Baily's Hill and Went Hill. So which one is not a real sister?

12. In 100 metres pass through a wooden fieldgate onto the shingle beach of **Cuckmere Haven**.
13. Ignore a path to the left and instead continue straight ahead across the shingle, passing a pool on your left, to reach the bank of the **Cuckmere River** in 120 metres.

Though the onward route lies over the cliffs ahead, you now have to make a **4.2km (2.6 mile) detour inland** to cross the river (and get to lunch at Exceat).

*Note that tempting though it looks just to wade the river, the Cuckmere River is deeper than it looks and surprisingly fast flowing, and trying to cross it is NOT recommended.*

14. To continue the walk, turn left along the river. In 1.2km, 300 metres before the road bridge, the bank makes a sharp turn left along a hedge. 80 metres later, at a crosspaths, go right to follow a path between two barbed wire fences.
15. In 250 metres pass through a wooden gate to enter the car park of the **Cuckmere Inn**. Carry on through the car park for 70 metres to reach the A259. The entrance to the pub is on the left.

### **Exceat to Birling Gap** **(6.5km/4 miles)**

16. To continue the walk cross the busy A259 with care, and turn right to follow the pedestrian path across **Exceat Bridge**. At the other side of the bridge, re-cross the road. **You now have a choice:**
  - **If you are not planning to stop at the Saltmarsh tea rooms or the Exceat Visitor Centre** go through a kissing gate just to the right of the bus stop to emerge onto the bank of the Cuckmere River. Carry on along this, with the river to your right. In 800 metres pass through a kissing gate and in another 100 metres, just after a body of water ends on your left, turn left onto a chalk path between two lagoons. In 15 metres cross a stile to the right of metal barriers and in 40 metres more turn right on a gravel track. In 40 metres, at a junction marked by a multi-arm footpath post, fork left following the South Downs Way signpost. Continue the directions in paragraph 17 overleaf.
  - Alternatively, **to stop at the Saltmarsh tea room**, carry on along the road walking away from the bridge. In 400 metres,

where the main road curves right ignore a minor road to the left, but cross the A259 again with care and go straight up a tarmac drive. In 50 metres, when level with the car park, turn right. The entrance to the tea room is on the left in 10 metres, and in another 40 metres the **Exceat Visitor Centre** is on the right: among other things, it has interesting historic pictures showing just how rapidly the cliffs of the Seven Sisters are eroding.

Beyond the Visitor Centre, turn left along the fence, to reach the main road in 20 metres. Cross the road with care and go straight ahead through a gate to the left of a wooden fieldgate with a cattle grid. Carry on along a concrete car-wide track (or the grassy path running parallel to it on the right-hand side).

In 1.2km, just after passing around a spur of a hill to your left, you come to a multi-armed footpath signpost. Ignore multiple gateways immediately on your left to carry straight on through a wooden gate to the left of a fieldgate onto a stony track.

70 metres further, at another multi-armed footpath sign, take the left fork, signposted South Downs Way. Continue with the directions in the next paragraph.

17. You now stay on the **South Downs Way** all the way to the outskirts of Eastbourne. In 70 metres pass through a wooden gate and up steps. Carry on uphill, with a wire fence to your right following the fence, as it curves gently right uphill.
18. In 750 metres pass through a gate and carry straight on.
19. 250 metres later you come to the summit of **Haven Brow**, the first (and highest) of the **Seven Sisters**, which is marked with a three-armed signpost. Bear left along the clifftop, following the South Downs Way signpost.
20. You now pass into three dips and up over three summits, in order **Short**

**Bottom, Short Brow, Limekiln Bottom, Rough Brow, Rough Bottom** and **Brass Point**. After the last of these you have a long 400 metre descent (the lateral distance, not the amount of vertical descent) to **Gap Bottom** before rising for 150 metres to reach the peak of **Flagstaff Point**, which is marked by a low Sarsen stone monument.

21. Beyond this keep straight on along the clifftop path for 2km to Birling Gap, whose buildings are visible ahead. You pass over three more humps – one minor one – **Flat Hill** – and two major ones – **Baily's Hill** and **Went Hill**.
22. 150 metres after the summit of Went Hill **you pass through a wooden kissing gate**. In 60 metres you pass between a fence right and bushes left down a path, which in 25 metres brings you to another kissing gate and a T-junction. Turn right here for 25 metres and then left with the path, past a wooden fieldgate onto what is now a gravel track.
23. Carry on down this track and in 250 metres, 30 metres before you come to a road, turn right at steps leading down to a toilet block, and across the car park to the cliff top of **Birling Gap**, where you will find the **National Trust tea room** and visitor centre, the recommended tea stop. Here are also steps down the cliff to the beach.

*To walk to East Dean from here (option c in **Walk Options** on page 2), refer to the instructions in paragraph 39 on page 7.*

### **Birling Gap to Beachy Head (3.8km/2.4 miles)**

24. After tea, from the clifftop at Birling Gap face inland and go half-right across the car park aiming for the landward end of the coastguard cottages to rejoin the clifftop path.
25. Follow this path uphill. At the start of the climb look back for fine views of the Seven Sisters. In 1km you come to **Belle Tout Lighthouse** (see panel on next page). Pass through this if the gates are open, or otherwise to the left of it on a broad grassy path, and beyond it carry on,

parallel to the cliff edge down into a large dip.

26. In 350 metres, at the bottom of the dip, ignore the road to your left and carry straight on up the next rise in the cliff path.
27. You now climb solidly for 2.8km (1.7 miles) to **Beachy Head**, the one exception being a sharp and unexpected dip after about 1km. You know you have reached Beachy Head proper when you come to an eight-sided memorial to armed forces personnel involved in the Second World War defences which were sited here. Across the road 130 metres away half left is the **Beachy Head** pub, a possible tea or dinner stop.

**Belle Tout** first entered service in 1828, over 130 years after the need for a lighthouse on this spot was first suggested. It had 30 oil lamps, requiring two gallons of oil per hour. A problem with its location soon became apparent, however – when the weather was bad, the clifftop tended to be shrouded in mist so the light could not be seen. The cliff also blocked the view of the light from ships sailing too close to the shore.

As a result, a new lighthouse was built – the one that still stands at the base of Beachy Head to this day. It opened in 1902 and Belle Tout went out of commission. It was a tea room for a while, was used as target practice by Canadian artillery during World War II, and was later restored by the local council.

By the 1990s Belle Tout was a private house and in danger of falling into the sea due to cliff erosion, and so in March 1999 in a feat of engineering that captured national media attention, it was moved back 17 metres away from the cliff using hydraulic jacks. It was then bought by a preservation trust and in March 2010 started a new life as a luxury bed and breakfast, with the lattern room turned into a lounge with 360 degree views.

### **Beachy Head to Eastbourne station (5.4km/3.3 miles)**

28. **If not stopping at the pub**, from the memorial carry on for 100 metres to a shallow dip, and then turn right on a tarmac path that skirts around the seaward side of a small hill. (**If coming out of the pub**, veer to the right around the higher ground on the far side of the road to find this tarmac path, and turn left onto it.)
29. In 120 metres, where the path swings right to a viewpoint, continue straight on a gravelly section of path toward a post with a yellow arrow. In 20 metres, just before the arrow post, re-cross the tarmac path, and carry straight on in the direction of the arrow, along a footpath which runs just below the tarmac path initially.
30. Stay on this path, the **South Downs Way**, keeping just below the lip of the ridge to your left, and ignoring all ways off.
31. In 650 metres, at a fork in the path, take the leftmost path, marked by a yellow arrow on a post, which climbs up onto the ridge and passes a bench to your left in 50 metres. Beyond this curve left along a line of hawthorn bushes, passing another post with a yellow arrow on it.
32. In 200 metres, at a footpath sign, veer right following the sign to Seafront SDW, your direction 30 degrees.
33. This car-wide grassy path descends gradually at first between bushes and small trees, and then across open hillside, for 1km all the way to the edge of **Eastbourne**. The last part is a steep descent of a hillside to a bend in a road, the B2103 or Foyle Way. When you reach the road, there should be a refreshment kiosk on your right.
34. When you get to the road, keep straight on along the right-hand side of it. In 100 metres, you cross the driveway to St Bede's Preparatory School, and in 80 metres, the entrance to Helen Gardens on your right. In a further 70 metres, turn right, into Holywell Drive,

signposted: "Holywell Promenade (Western Pde)".

35. Continue downhill, ignoring turnings off, and in 300 metres, merge with the seafront promenade. Follow this all the way to Eastbourne Pier, a distance of 2km.
36. The stop for the 12 or 13X bus is to be found 10 metres beyond the pier entrance. But to go to Eastbourne railway station, 120 metres before the pier, climb steps to your left, to reach a pedestrian crossing across the seafront road.
37. Cross here, and turn right, then immediately left, down Terminus Road.
38. In 200 metres, at a crossroads (with the **Qualisea**, a recommended fish and chip restaurant on your right), go straight on up Eastbourne's pedestrian shopping street (still Terminus Place), crossing Pevensey Road and curving left with the road in 100 metres. Ignoring ways off and keeping to the main shopping street, in 500 metres more you come to **Eastbourne Station** on your right.

### **Birling Gap to East Dean** **(2.3km/1.4 miles)**

39. From the cafe, walk inland through the car park and past the toilet block, and turn left on the car wide gravel track beyond it, which leads uphill past some houses.
40. In 300 metres the track goes through a gate and turns right. In 20 metres more ignore a path to the left and keep straight on.
41. In 70 metres or so pass through a gate into an open field and keep uphill across this, with fine views of the sea behind and to the left.
42. In 200 metres pass through another gate and keep uphill on a faint grassy track.
43. In 600 metres, near the top of the hill, you pass a barn with a striking orange roof. Here **veer right off the track to converge with the line of scrub** (which has a brief gap shortly afterwards, but then resumes).

44. 300 metres or so beyond the barn, **look out for a footpath post to the right**, which indicates the start of a path slanting through the scrub and down the escarpment.
45. Carry on down this path, passing through a gate in 150 metres and in 100 metres another. You are now in an open field. Keep on down its right-hand edge, passing to the left of a house, to come to a tarmac lane in 100 metres
46. Follow this tarmac lane into the centre of East Dean (a village green). Turn right across the green towards the **Tiger Inn** pub.
47. Just in front of the Tiger Inn turn right down a brick-paved driveway. Immediately to your right here is another tea stop – the **Hikers Rest**.
48. Carry on down the brick-paved driveway to the road and turn left on it.
49. *Ignore the bus stop towards the end of this road which is for the 13X bus.* For all other buses, carry on to the main road: the stop for **Eastbourne** is **across** the main road, on the **right**. The stop for **Seaford** is to the **left** on this side of the road.

If heading for Eastbourne, when the bus comes, ask for a ticket to the Arndale Centre. The journey takes about 15 minutes, and the Arndale Centre stop is about 150 metres beyond the railway station.

Getting off the bus, simply walk back up the road a short distance to find the station. If you stay on the bus it will take you within a few minutes to Eastbourne Pier, its end stop. This is a good option if you want to have fish and chips, or a final walk by the sea.

For the **Qualisea** fish and chip restaurant, walk 150 metres south west from the pier and take the first major road inland – Terminus Road, which also leads back to Eastbourne's main shopping street and the station.